

**Interview with Dr. George Casey
Conducted by Linda Byrne for the
Providence District History Project Providence Perspective**

Linda Byrne: Today is February 12, 2008, I am Linda Byrne and I am here at the office of Dr. George Casey a dentist in Oakton, Virginia. Good afternoon George.

George Casey: Good afternoon.

Linda: Would you tell me a little about yourself? Please start at the beginning.

George: Well, I was born in 1946 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and was educated at Washington Jefferson College, which is in Washington, Pennsylvania, then at University of Pittsburgh Dental School. I went into the Army and was stationed at Fort Lee in Petersburg, Virginia and obviously came through this area quite a bit during that time up to 1972. I found I liked the Washington area a lot. It was a big change and a big move to a more developed area when I decided to start my practice here in Oakton.

Linda: Was this the first place you started practicing Dentistry?

George: Initially my first office was on the Oakton Fairfax border just on the other side of Rt. 66 and I was there for the 5 year lease period of time and then the opportunity at the Oakton Professional Center opened up, because they were just starting to develop it. I was the first office that was built in here.

Linda: So actually you own the place.

George: It is a condominium, yes. I worked with different associates, part time while I was developing my own practice and by 1974 I was pretty much in my own office. Initially I went into partnership with Dr. Barry Herbst and then between the two of us, our business got too large for that

office. We then both stayed in the same building, but we split up into separate offices.

It has been quite an experience. The changes that have occurred; we use to have a golf driving range right here in Oakton, where the AT&T building is and we would go over there and hit golf balls at lunchtime.

We use to be able to do a lot of things in that one-hour of lunchtime and now with the traffic and everything you are really limited as to what you can get done in such a short period of time. But love the area; it has developed very nicely. I think that those in charge of the way things are flowing in the county have done an outstanding job as far as allowing as much growth that has occurred with out it affecting us other than the increase in traffic. The school systems are top of the line within the United States. The sports organizations are incredible for the youth. When I was growing up, I think we had Little League and that was about it. Now you have three or four sports all at one time each season so the kids stay pretty busy and the parents stay pretty busy picking them up and taking them to practice. It really has developed into a wonderful area.

Now, if I would go back and say comparing the Pittsburgh area to the Northern Virginia area we found, and I think all of us found that in the 1940's, 1950's and 1960's we were a lot more family oriented with grandma and grandpa and everybody within a 10 to 15 mile radius. Here it is like a melting pot, not as many family dinners every week and things like that. I think that everybody is on the go and I believe it is like that throughout the whole country.

Linda: When you first moved to Virginia and started your practice could you talk a little about teeth and health care as it was then as opposed to now, the differences and changes you have seen?

George: I think there has been a dramatic change in Dentistry in this area or throughout the world. When I started practice the family dentist was considered or thought of rather highly, thought of as to be very reliable and honest and trust worthy. People got a dentist and stayed with that dentist as long as they were in that area. I found that as time goes on people have

a tendency to change dentists a lot more often for many reasons - such that when I first set up here in Oakton, we had patients coming from Great Falls, Leesburg, and all areas around because they could get here very easily. Now I have patients complaining because they have to go through Tyson's Corner to get here or they have to go across Rt. 66 to get here. It is just a lot more time involvement to get here to the office. The other thing is I think it started with the Clinton Administration, with their interest in Health Care for everyone, that there were a lot of PPO's that started up where you had different insurance organizations or insurance companies that were trying to get all different groups of people.

Linda: What is a PPO?

George: A PPO is where a dentist will sign up with a particular insurance company and the insurance companies offer the patients about a 10 to 15 % discount on the prices, but they (meaning the insurance company) refer you to all the patients. It is a good win, win type of situation but if your company changes from one insurance company to another then that new insurance company would refer you to a dentist who is with them. Then, you would have a choice as to whether you wanted to stay with us or you would go with them. We may not take that particular insurance and then the patient would have to; well the insurance company loses its position as being middleman. It has sort of married patients to the insurance company more so than to the dentist. We find that to be a sad result as to what has happened here especially with such a transient area with a lot of the number of growth of the amount of dentist's in the area. Some dentists come into the area and sign up with every single program that they can and build their practice in a very short period of time. It is more of a business now than it used to be. You use to grow with the families in your office, you use to remember the kids when they were young and then you see their kids come in and everything like that, but you really don't see that much anymore at least not as much as we would like to get.

As far as dentistry and how much it has changed? When I first started practice we might have done 10 dentures a year and now we may see one a year that we do. So obviously people are keeping their teeth longer, people are much more aware of oral hygiene, aesthetics than they use to

be. Dentistry has changed in that direction, mostly to the good in some ways aesthetics have been rated above what is best for the patient's well being in the long run. So there are shows on TV like the makeover show where they do dramatic changes in people's appearances. The long term result of what they have done is created a problem for how is this person going to be able to maintain it, replace it when needed and how are they going to be able to afford to replace it when it needs to be because it is not going to be done for television purposes the second time around. So we have people asking things that are probably not necessarily needed. We have people getting their teeth whitened three or four times a year and insisting on that. Tooth whitening should last three to four years. We have people using those trays to whiten their teeth and they are whitening them every single night for a year or a year and a half and then they come in and can't understand why they have decay. So, everything can be overdone. But as long as people are in charge of taking care of themselves, they'll need work done because we don't take good enough care of ourselves as we should.

Linda: Well one of the things that I have noticed over the years, and I have been coming to Dr. Casey for almost 25 years now, when you mentioned that people use to stay with their own dentist that is true. I had a dentist in the Washington D.C. area up until the time I came to you when I was 45 years old, I had that same dentist all those years except when we might have lived in another area of the country for a year or two. But, over the 25 years I have been coming to you I have noticed your practice has evolved into a lot of different aspects of tooth care and I have always appreciated the fact that I didn't have to go to someone else to have the work done. Before if I had a tooth that needed a root canal, I had to go another dentist and then come back to my original dentist whereas you do all of that work here.

George: How did that happen? (Linda: Yes) That is a good question. I spent almost two years in the military and we were down at Ft. Lee, like I said before, Virginia. Ft. Lee had 36 dentists, eight of which were specialists and I guess the Commandant of the dental core there had each one of us rotate through all of the specialists for three or four months at a time, so in a long run over a two year period we might do 70 or 80 root canals. For

example I rotated through surgery there and on week ends I was on call at the hospital for oral surgery so I had the opportunity to sew up after fights and the opportunity to do about 180 sets of Wisdom teeth during my period there. A friend of mine who went to a very prestigious oral surgery school did 30 sets of Wisdom teeth in his residency there and I was doing quite a bit more. So I had the opportunity to do a little bit of everything and I really felt that a patient would rather come into an office that they are familiar with than to go to one they are not familiar with to have some type of specialty work done. Now the key to that is that you recognize that you know what your limitations are and you communicate to whatever referral doctor you are using exactly what you want to accomplish. Many times I'll go over and stand in on whatever other doctors are doing to my patients just to make sure we are all on the same page. The purpose of the general dentist is to oversee all of the things in your dental treatment whether he or she are doing it themselves or referring it out. So that is why we have always really enjoyed treating the whole family, treating the children from age 2 ½ and encouraging mom to bring the kids in, sit in the room, ride up and down in the chair and get familiar with the office so it is not such a breath taking experience for the first time. Then staying with the kids all the way through and taking pleasure in seeing they are going to college, they have a child; it is just a whole bunch of families.

Linda: You have taken care of my son who is now going to be 23 and he has just moved to Indianapolis so we have an example of when he comes back home, maybe he will continue with his regular dentist or maybe he will have to change.

George: I still have memories of him, when he was coming in even before we were treating him he was coming in with you. For years I tried to recruit him to play youth football because your son was huge when he was a kid but it was just the joking over the years because he never did play for me. I think that if he came in today, I would still try to tell him to put on a football uniform and play football so it is nice to remember all of these things.

Linda: Tell me about all your volunteer work with local football.

George: Well actually when I was in the Military, I would help coach a youth football team but when I moved up here I was so busy trying to get my practice started and I was very much involved with the Jaycee's in Fairfax and I had a really great experience with that over a two or three period of time. We raised quite a bit of money to start their emergency mobile clinic that has gone all over the country.

Linda: Now the Jaycees is what group?

George: It used to be called the Junior Chamber of Commerce but it is no longer involved with that. It was a men's organization at that time and now it is mixed. It was for 35 years of age and under for business people in the community and we did things like we walked 26 miles and you would have people sign up for 10 cents a mile or this or that, just to raise money for different things. Our pet project was the fire departments medical mobile, they had a mobile unit that would actually stabilize by coming up off the ground, off the tires so that surgery or everything like that could actually be done in the unit. Now they have them world wide, I know for Katrina they were down there a number of weeks trying to help. That might actually be a good organization to talk about or talk to as far as what their history is because that was the original one in the Washington area. (Linda, interesting) So when I moved over here my son had played soccer regularly, baseball and things like that and all of a sudden one year he wanted to play football and I would go to the practices and kept thinking they could do better than this. So, I just started coaching football and became very much involved with the Vienna Youth Program.

At the beginning I was just coaching and then I became the Treasurer and then I was in charge of the newsletter. And I can still remember we use to do the newsletters on our living room floor with a rolodex and we would take the addresses and hand address all the newsletters and send them out to all the families involved in the Vienna Youth.

Linda: What years would this have been?

George: That would have been about 1980 and 1981 and then from there I became President of the Vienna Youth for a year and then started having children all over the place and sort of backed off of that and just coached since then. Then in 1993 or 1994 I was brought into the Hall of Fame for the Vienna Youth and I have just been involved tremendously every since then. My son now coaches with me, my son Todd, and he practices dentistry with me and we have been together now for 11 years. It has been a lot of fun and a very exciting experience. I don't think there is anything more rewarding than to be able to work with your son in the same profession and to see him grow and now we teach each other every day and it is fun.

Linda: That is great. What do you find unique about living in this area as opposed to the area you grew up in?

George: That is a difficult question because so many years have been separated from the two. I think that the Vienna Oakton area is very unique to the Washington metropolitan area. Vienna Oakton is an entity unto itself. I think that there are many things historically in Vienna for example, the Vienna Inn or when we had the Appalachian Outfitters here in Oakton, just things that were a sight or a spot where everybody knew where it was and had visited there. We have our Halloween parade, Viva Vienna Day, Fourth of July down at Caffey Field and constantly the community center in Vienna has antique weekends, stamp weekends, there is something different going on at all times. It makes you feel more like the small town that you grew up in. I grew up in Sewickley, Pennsylvania a small suburb of Pittsburgh and I still go up there and feel very at home there and I think that if I would ever move out of Vienna I would have the same feeling if I came back here. This is a place I belong, I have changed a lot and it's changed a lot but we have changed together and you can recognize that. It is unique and people that live in Vienna, like people that went to Madison High School they stay here forever, it is amazing and they still have that same group. I bet you that the group that graduated in 1975 probably 1/3 of that class still live within 10 miles of each other.

Linda: Oh isn't that wonderful. I know that Mark Merrill the current Principal, not only taught there but he graduated from Madison High School.

George: Yes, Mark was a very good athlete at Madison a very good student too. You know it is funny how a lot of these people all know each other from when they were kids and they know each other's parents and they tell stories about when they were growing up and how this father helped them get out of this trouble or a mother helped them get out of this problem and it is like everybody knows each other.

Linda: One of the other things I noticed happening in Oakton is there is a lot of renovation going on in the Giant Shopping Center. It is having a facelift and you have the new library right across the street from your office, although Appalachian Outfitters an older building is gone here now do you find that the small town flavor is still staying because of these things happening, like the library?

George: Yes it is still staying. I think the Oakton Shopping Center needed a facelift and I know that it was an inconvenience for people for quite a while, while they were doing it but I think in the long run the way the parking lot is set up and everything I think people will be able to walk around and be able to say Hi to each other. Before it was too crowded and you were really watching out for yourself as you went through there as far as the other cars and everything. Now it is a lot more convenient to get around in there. I think that the fact we have the new library, I think it is going to be a place where smaller groups can meet and a great place to just go over and spend time with the computers, getting books and that type of thing. With the development of the new library in Fairfax it will now be so easy to extend your learning potential from one library to another. I know the library in Vienna has been a very popular place for a lot of years with students going over there. Now you can take your child to the library and set them up with how to find different information and be there yourself in one of the quiet rooms while they are doing their work and it gives you an opportunity to find a book you might like and spend some time with it. I think everything has been for the good. They have been very careful with the development of Oakton, we do have some commercial property and I

think it has been developed relatively with taste. We don't have a whole lot of room for commercial property and I think that has really helped because the traffic through Oakton would be a lot more difficult if we had more shopping centers or more business hi-risers or anything like that. So we basically have kept this area small town.

Linda: We have the new Oakton Park, which will be developed in the next couple of years, which is 10 acres and a stones throw from your office really. There is also the retirement home, which is right here, and I wonder if you could talk about dentistry, and the home and the people that are there, health care or the care of their teeth?

George: I think the aged problem we have today is that the people are living much longer than we had expected our parents to live. One of the first things to deteriorate is the digestive system so the ability to masticate your food is the first step in the digestive process. It is very important for patients to maintain their teeth and unfortunately in a Care Program like we have here in the homes they can brush their teeth and if they have dentures quite often they lose their dentures or they get mixed up between patients. So, we can do things like put their name on their dentures or we can realign their dentures right in the facility there. We often have patients that come over here or are brought over here by a loved one or basically a person from the community that gives them a ride over and they come in and we see them on a regular basis or we will go over into the facility itself. I think the Sunrise is great, and I think it is one of the first Sunrise facilities that existed and they are all over the country now. I think these types of care housing is a thing of the future and it allows one to age with dignity and I hope when I get to be that age there will be places as nice as they have here.

Linda: Well thank you, is there anything else that I may have forgotten to ask that might be something you might want to share.

George: Well I have five grandchildren.

Linda: Well, we can't forget them.

George: So, we have started all over again as far as watching kids grow up and develop. I did get the opportunity of coaching my oldest grandchild who is 7 years old, in football this year so that was a real blast, and Todd and I coach together which I mentioned before. It is a wonderful community to grow up in and parent in and that sort of parallels where I grew up and where my kids grew up and now my grandchildren are growing up. I think I am very lucky to have found the home that I had in Pittsburgh and to have found the home that I have here. It is just a special place.

Linda: So you have a son and a daughter?

George: A son and three daughters.

Linda: And the five grandchildren are from which ones?

George: My son and eldest daughter. I have a daughter at the college in Charleston, South Carolina and I have another daughter that goes to the LAB school in Washington, DC and so we are not done yet. We are not done getting them all through the educational system yet. So it is fun to just see how people have one interest and they all go to school and for that interest and about a year later they will just totally redirect into something they find that they really, really like. Then, their grades will go up and they start studying harder and it all becomes a lot easier for them because they found their niche and it is nice to see people do that, especially when they are your children.

Linda: So your children have gone through the Fairfax County Public School System.

George: That is correct. Todd and Beth graduated from Oakton High School, Carol went to Madison High School, Carol and Megan went to Wolftrap Elementary School and Megan is now down at the LAB school which is a school for children that have some learning disabilities and she has done quite well there.

Linda: That is wonderful. Well I thank you very much for this interview, we really appreciate it and do you have anything else before we sign off?

George: No I think I have said just about everything.

Linda: Again, I thank you.